

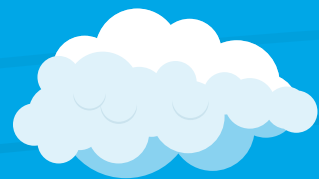
Explore
LEARNING

Explore Learning
**WRITERS'
AWARDS**
2019

TOP 10 STORIES

2019

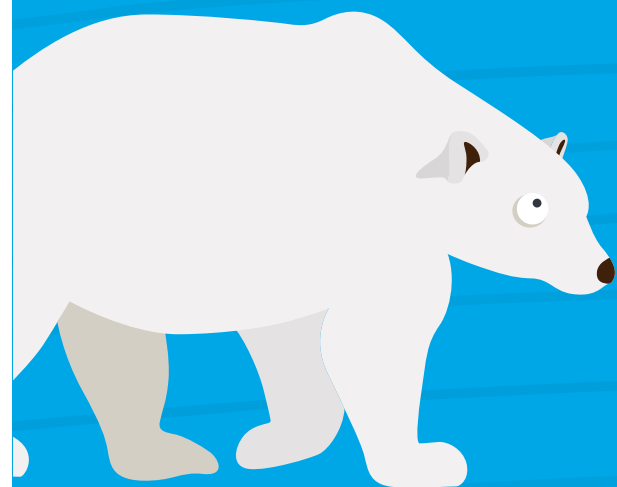




Explore LEARNING

All of these young authors have done so well to make it to the top 10 in this year's writing competition. To fight off competition from over 17,000 children across the UK is no mean feat and they should be hugely proud of their achievements.

We started the Explore Learning Writers' Awards to inspire the next generation of young writers and we hope that we have done exactly that, giving the next Roald Dahl, David Walliams or Alesha Dixon oodles of confidence in their creative abilities.



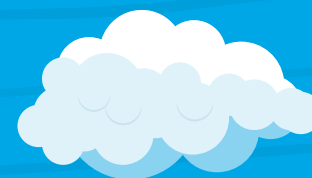
Illustrations by Explore Learning and
Katerina Demetriou-Jones



I was thrilled by the quality of writing in the entries for the Explore Learning Writers' Awards. It is a huge achievement to be named in the top 10 of the competition, as we have so many creative young people in this country. It is so encouraging to see the promise of the talented young writers of tomorrow.



Alesha Dixon
Judge 2019



THE GOLDEN KNICKERS

By Holly Dunn, age 10

The Queen may have lots of valuables, but there was one thing we never knew about; her golden underwear! She says they're worth over a million pounds and she treats them like they're her children and I mean literally! No one knows about this gold frilly underwear, not even the housekeeper, Lily, and that's the first she knew about everything - even the Queen's diamond swimming costume. And that's another story you don't want to know!

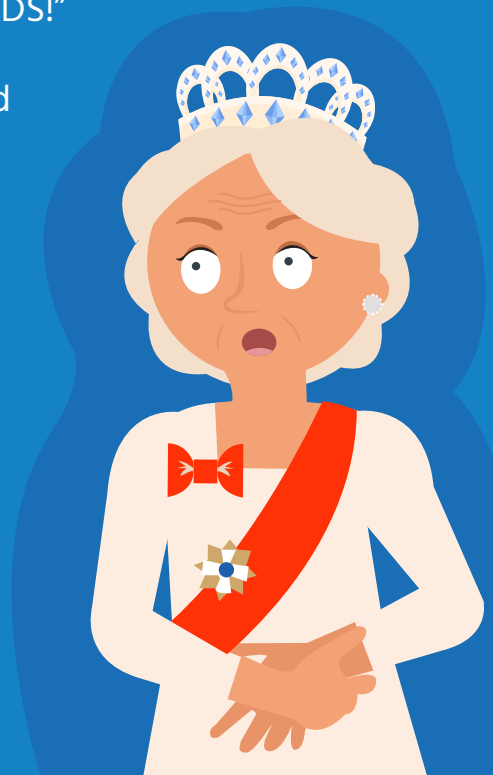
She never used to wear them too much, but now she wears them all the time because she won the lottery one time when she was wearing them. So now they're not just gold underwear; they are also her lucky underwear! The underwear isn't just your everyday golden underwear; they shimmer under the sun and in the dark look like shining disco balls, and when she isn't wearing the underwear, she hides them at the back of the palace.



In the distance, in the silent but deadly breeze, stood a small black figure with lightning yellow eyes. He rolled around as he was stuck and entwined in the thorns. Soon after he was unstuck, he tried to get into the Queen's palace. He tried getting through the guards, which wasn't easy. He tried pulling funny faces and even tried pretending he was a guard, which wasn't easy as he had to stand there for long time without moving. But you could tell he wasn't a guard; the black suit gave it away! He tried just walking causally through; that didn't work either, so he went home which was just around the corner.

It was midnight. In the darkest hour the figure wanted to strike again! This time the guards were asleep very deeply. He opened the gate slowly. 'CREEK' the gate opened. Luckily the guards didn't wake up. He went to steal the crown jewels, but in its place was instead some golden underwear! So, he took those instead. Suddenly, in a blink of an eye, the door opened. It was the Queen; "GUARDS!" she shouted as all the guards rushed over to take him away. Before they left, they took the mask off him and you won't believe it. It was.... DAVID WALLIAMS!! No way, he wanted the golden pants?? "Why do you have golden pants anyway?" asked David Walliams.

"Mm... he's right" muttered the Queen, and that's why she sold them and used the money for charity. Now she just wears normal knickers like everyone else!



OPERATION KINDNESS WEB

By Harry Orme, age 9

“Give me a pound or I’ll spit on you.” That’s Doug Hopkinson for you and I am the one he was threatening. Doug was the school knucklehead. No-one liked him, except Alice. She believed in him and even enjoyed his far-fetched stories. She believed in him so much that she would say kind things to him even though he was the main school bully. Sometimes the hardest thing in the world is to believe in yourself.

I was sitting in the playground on a bright summer’s day, just watching Doug kicking yet another helpless little child when I had a thought; maybe I could do something about this...to stop it happening. Operation ‘Kindness Web’ activate. That night I worked on my plan by the glow of my laptop. The website was complete. Now all I had to do was put my plan into action.

The next day I approached Doug bravely (if I do say so myself) and gave him a Yorkie bar. He snatched it off me and scoffed it in his face. As he was about

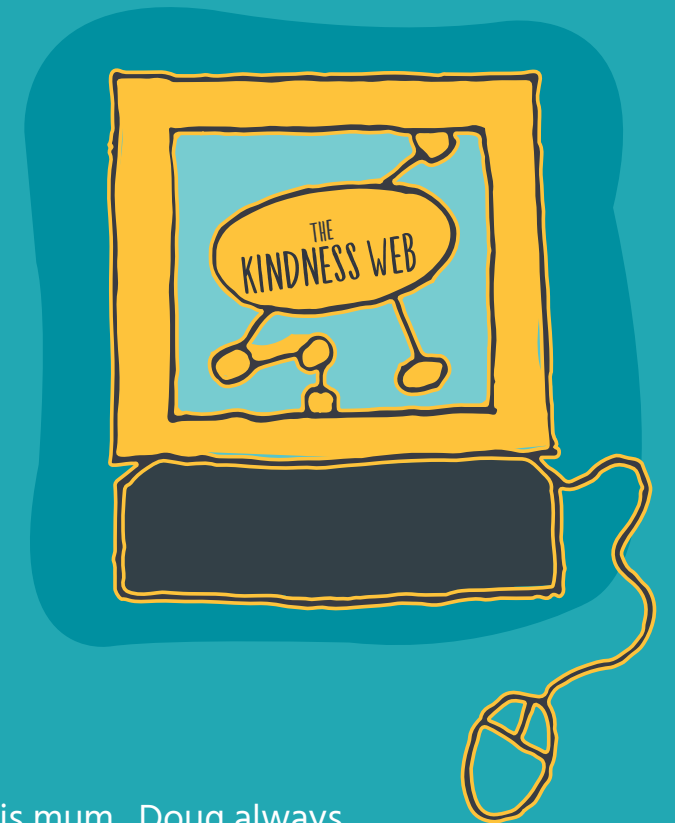


to chuck the wrapper on the floor a flash of black and white caught his eye against the silvery interior of the wrapper. It was a unique QR code (put there by me). He looked at it for a moment, thought for a moment and then scanned it with his phone. It took him to the Web of Kindness (invented by yours truly).

Nobody was ever nice to Doug, even his mum. Doug always felt pretty miserable. He still threw the wrapper on the floor, but that night when he got home and was feeling sad and lonely, he remembered the website. When he opened it a picture of a web came up with only two names woven into it (mine and Alice’s).

The next day Doug was about to tip Tommy Geraldson into the bin when a voice in his head reminded him of the Web of Kindness and the 2 names. His name wasn’t there YET. He could change that though. He decided that he should ignore what his guts were telling. He reached into his pocket for the code he had printed out, then he gave (a very surprised) Tommy a hug and handed him the code. Doug added his name to the web. Around school, things changed, and people were kinder to each other. More names were added to the web. On Friday Mr Jakarta, the grumpy science teacher, told us to have fun and do no homework (his name joined the web). That weekend Theresa May was on the front of the paper making a rule to create free toy banks for all children to share. Her name was added to the web. The QR code was at the bottom of the article. I had gone viral.

I had made the impossible possible. Kindness was spreading around the world now. Believing in yourself is the best thing in the world as well as the hardest.

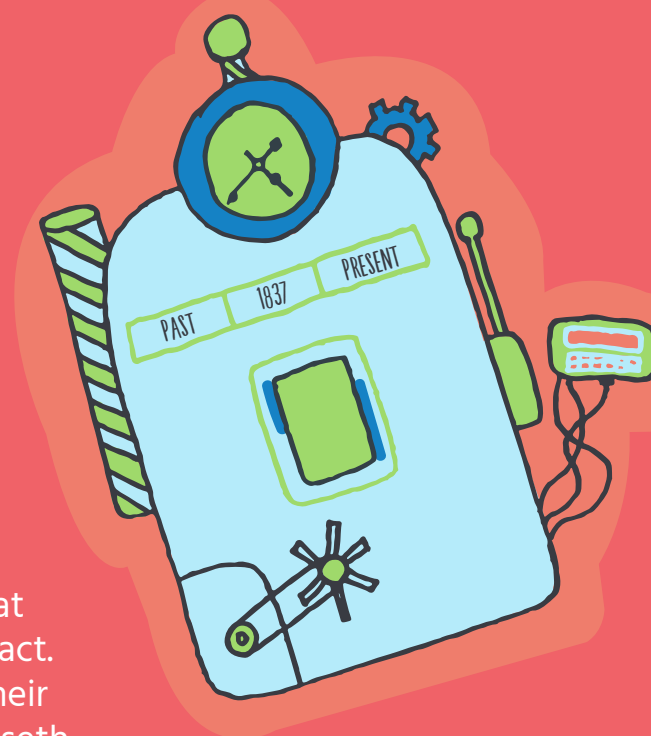
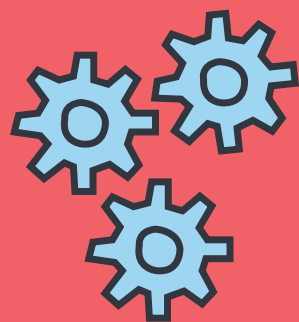
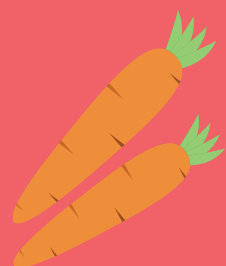


A WORLD WITHOUT VEGETABLES

By Isla Kitagawa, age 10

Vegetables. The darkness that corrupts the world. Also, Benny's worst nightmare. "EAT YA VEG!" shouted his mum. And for the fifth time this week, Benny yelled back, "I shall not cover before the EVIL that is VEG!" then ran up to his room. "Only if the world had no vegetables..." he thought. "Wait a minute!" He searched under the bed and found a time machine (that looked curiously like a TV remote) lying around along with a pair of pants. And, was that a dead body...? Never mind! He took the time machine and typed in WHEN VEGETABLES WERE DISCOVERED and pressed START.

A minute later, he arrived in the Stone Age to stop the caveman from finding the carrot patch. It was quick work - all it took was a tranquiliser dart to the head (also found under the bed). He flicked open his history book and looked for the page WHEN VEGETABLES WERE DISCOVERED to check if it still



existed. He then muttered "Oh fudge". It read "vegetables were discovered when two Victorian soldiers found a cucumber patch on duty". He had work to do.

A few moments later, he was standing in a cucumber patch with two soldiers staring at him blankly. Benny formulated a plan; distract. He started doing a weirdo dance to take their eyes away from the veggies then said "Theseth plants be full of the lurgies!" The soldier on the left sighed, "Okay mate, but you might want to see a doctor,". They walked away murmuring just loud enough to hear, "He's a nutter...". Benny's master plan was finished.

When he got home, he was surprised to see the city on fire and the streets covered in rubble. He edged past the groaning bodies that were scattered around the road and walked towards a group of slightly overweight middle aged men huddled around a bin fire. He wondered why they needed a bin fire when the whole city was up in flames. He also wondered why he was thinking these things. THE WHOLE FLIPPIN' CITY WAS UP IN FLAMES. He asked the man with the Sheffield United shirt what happened. "It was a few months back when the prime minister fell into a coma from chronic toothache and overweightness. We were doing okay until the toothpaste shipments got delayed and we got a little too rounded for the treadmills. The government then fell into chaos and a confused fireman set fire to Britain", he said. "The Queen's still alive though; tough old bird. Actually, she's in charge of that gang down the street. You know, the one with the leather jackets and baseball bats. Look, the one in the middle - oh no. She's got the crown sceptre out! You'd better get going now." "Mm hmm", said Benny grabbing the time machine. "I'll be right back."



THE WITCH WHO CHANGES THE WORLD

By Gosia Sieluzicka, age 5

Not that far away, deep in the heart of Dirdon, a little and friendly witch named Laura was exploring streets. "Come on, Ralphie!" she beckoned to her best friend, Ralphie the cat. "I am very hungry; I am sure my granny has something yummy." The cat was black with a white tail, but the most incredible thing was that Ralphie could speak. "I would go anywhere you want me to".

Walking through the streets they noticed their friendly Bell. It was a jumpy, always happy, frog. But that day she was crying, standing alone in the middle of a car park. "Oh gosh! What's the matter?" the friends asked. "I need to find a new place to live. There is so much rubbish in my pond. I can't live there anymore". Bell sobbed. "Don't worry, we'll help you," they offered.



In the park they found broken glass, plastic bottles, medicines and destroyed toys with batteries still inside. "I am not surprised you don't want to live here. It's very dangerous for your family, other animals and even for people", said the cat.

While Ralphie tried to cheer the frog, Laura cast a spell on the rubbish...

**Magic, magic hand
As I command,
Change this waste
Into taste
And clean up the land**

Thanks to her magic hand she changed all the rubbish into her favourite fruits like apples and bananas. "I didn't know that your hand could do magic like that!" Surprised frog thanked the friendly witch for saving her life. They put everything into the basket and went to Granny. Old and kind Granny helped them prepare a huge bowl of fruit salad. Laura and her cat did lots of good deeds going back home. They shared the salad with homeless people they met. And they educated people who threw rubbish on the street not to do that anymore. "If everyone littered like you, all of us would drown in rubbish. You must promise to always protect the land and teach others", Laura warned. "You have our word".



NINJA PENGUINS SAVE THE SEA

By Jamie Hobson, age 7

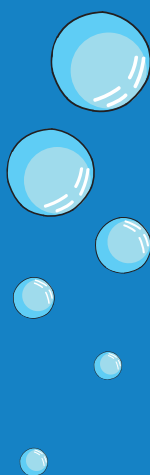
Have you ever wondered what goes on under the sea?

Well, let me tell you.

In the deep, dark depths of the sea lived four penguins, but they weren't ordinary penguins. They were Ninja Penguins!

There was Armstrong the muscle, Zoom the speed, Stealth the stealth and Smarty the brains. They lived under the sea in a cave covered in seaweed for camouflage. Inside their cave was a gym for Armstrong, computers for Smarty, a hamster wheel for Zoom and an obstacle course for Stealth. One day, deep, deep under the sea, in a cave hidden by seaweed, on an ordinary day in penguin headquarters, WEOR WEOR!!!! It's the alarm! Something must be wrong, Smarty rushed to see what was wrong. A fish is stuck in a plastic bottle in the Atlantic and he can't get out. "That's way too far away!" said Stealth. "I can get us there with my super-fast feet!" said Zoom. "You'll get tired." replied Smarty, "We're going to have to build a submarine!"

The four ninjas set off to get some scraps. They used a sunken pirate ship and used some glass bottles for turbo boosters, for Zoom to blow bubbles in. Smarty also attached some old computers. "It's ready! All aboard the

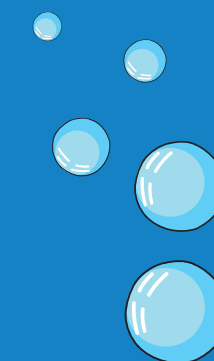


penguin express!" Armstrong gave it a push and jumped on. Off they went, but at that very moment, when they nearly got there, it ran out of battery! Everyone started to panic, but just when everything seemed lost, an idea popped into Zoom's head. He whispered it to Armstrong and they rushed outside. All of a sudden, the two ninjas on the inside started moving. "Look, we're back online!" shouted Smarty excitedly, "Now to the Atlantic!"

Finally, they arrived. The four swam over, Armstrong got his fin and whacked the bottom of the bottle. "Whoopee! I'm out, my name's Sam by the way." "Hi Sam, my name's Smarty and we're the ninja penguins. Be careful where you're swimming from now on! There's so much plastic pollution in the sea!"

"Well that was an interesting mission" said Stealth. On their way home, the ninjas spotted a crane dumping plastic in the sea! "No wonder there's so much plastic in the sea, we need to do something!" exclaimed Smarty. So, Stealth crept up and knocked out the guards "All clear!" he whispered. The rest of the ninjas climbed carefully out of the water. Armstrong and Smarty clambered up the ladder. When they reached the top, BANG! Armstrong had beaten up the crane driver! Smarty rushed to the controls and grabbed all of the plastic out of the water. "That put an end to that!" said Smarty and Armstrong as they climbed down. Then, they all went to catch their dinner.

They got home with their fish and sat down to eat. "Well, that was a great day's work fellas, make sure you get some good rest," Armstrong said, "Another mission could pop up at any moment!" WEOR WEOR!!



WELCOME, TO NEW AMERICA

By Isis Liddle, age 13

Zippering past in a train that had compacted as many passengers as possible on board, I knew where I was going – and it filled me with dread. Another day would be spent in sheer boredom.

As the train came to a screeching halt, I manoeuvred my way through the dense crowd. Polished stairs squealed under my feet. My leg brought me to the final step when I took my first glance up to the new age city right in front of me. The blinding lights of greens and blues were scattered across the landscape. Not too far away, cars rushed along busy motorways – blaring out noise from their horns. Skyscrapers loomed over, each one littered with ads. Humans ran around like ants. Pitter-patter...I looked up to the dome above as rain began to fall steadily. "Good morning, residents of New York," the intercom announced in a robotic voice. "Today it will rain for 30 minutes as requested by our polls. Please enjoy your day".

Dashing to get away from the rain, I slide into the doors of my work building. Placing my coat on my hanger, my bag on the floor and sitting at my cubicle, I was ready to work. My monotonous job consists of replying to unwanted emails sent to the corporation. Many believe my job is perfect as it is simple. However, for me, this work is tedious and the only reason I do it is so I can afford basic necessities. Those mind-numbingly long days luckily always come to an end and I am able to go home.



Sluggishly, I shuffled out the tower and made my way through the urban jungle. Finally, I arrived at the train station just as my train shrilled to a stop. Clambering on – elbow to elbow – I shoved my through and was able to find a seat to rest. In no time it was smoothly zooming. The metropolis shrunk until you could barely see it. It soon became dull and I began to ponder about what I always did.

While I was frustrated at my situation, I was even more frustrated at the reason why. Around 30 years before I was even born, there was a resource war between the past states of America. This ended in certain states being able to advance and evolve, while others were left to rot. Unfortunately, the state I was in lost the war and the majority of farm land, mines and other goods. Jobs began to be scarce so I had to look in other states for work.

All of a sudden, my thoughts came to a halt just as the train did. The warm, glistening sun embraced my skin as I departed from the train. Dirt tracks led me around the forgotten town. Fine brown dust clouded my vision in the form of a thick fog cloaking the run-down barns. With the last few steps, I was there. The splintered wood creaked under my weathered shoe...
I was home.



BLACK RHINO

By Louis Peckham, age 10



As the afternoon sun beat down on the grey hide, the crimson blood congealed with the red sand. The baby rhino nudged its mother. The carrion birds circled above as I walked towards the rhino lying on its side. I knew it was dead, but nervously I approached the violence. As I reached for my camera, emotions flooded over me and my stomach lurched. Why would humans do this?

The baby rhino looked at me, trauma etched on its face. I crouched down to make myself less intimidating. With the baby rhino cowering behind its dead mother, I began to click, the camera whirring as I took a flurry of exposures, capturing the destruction and cruelty that lay in front. Tears streaming, I reached for my radio, "Baruti, there's been another one.....rhino number 2646", I read the number from the GPS tag hanging around its neck. In that instant I knew it was Nyaga. Nyaga had come to the reserve in the depths of the Okavango Delta in Botswana, 10 years earlier, as a young black rhino calf. Her mother had been poached for her horn, and now in some twisted irony it was Nyaga suffering the same fate, leaving her calf, Tan, orphaned.



Saba and her team of rangers arrived in the Jeep. A sombre silence fell, we were enveloped in grief. Saba nodded to the recovery team to sedate Tan and take him back to the sanctuary. Baruti struggled to take aim with the sedation rifle, the poignancy of the calf huddling next to his dead mother rendering him almost immobile. Saba whispered, 'Baruti, we need to get Tan out of here.' Regaining composure, he fired the dart at Tan; within minutes he was asleep. We moved quickly to get Tan onto the stretcher and then into the trailer. I motioned I'd sit in the trailer, and climbed in. As we started to move, I looked back at Nyaga. The sun was beginning to set, red streaks across the sky, mirroring the bloodshed. I photographed Nyaga for the last time before the dust kicked up by the tyres covered the lens. I rested my hand on Tan. His closed eyes were wet. This innocent animal had helplessly watched his mother slain, and for what? For her horn. Worth more than gold, it was destined for the black market either for use in traditional Chinese medicine, or as a status symbol. The irrepressible greed of humankind had brought about this tragedy. I vowed to Tan I'd tell his story. I'd post my photos everywhere and awaken the public conscience to this barbaric treatment. I'd make people sit up and notice; this needless slaughter must stop. Guilt, shame, shock, whatever emotion these pictures generate, I will harness their power as a call to arms.

I am Charlie Harrison. I am a photographer. My mission is to make people realise how important it is to save the black rhino. This is how I will make a difference.



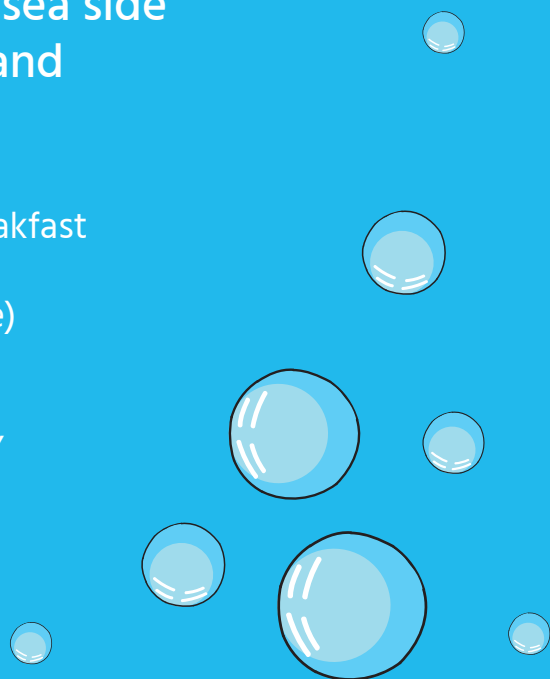
TIDE



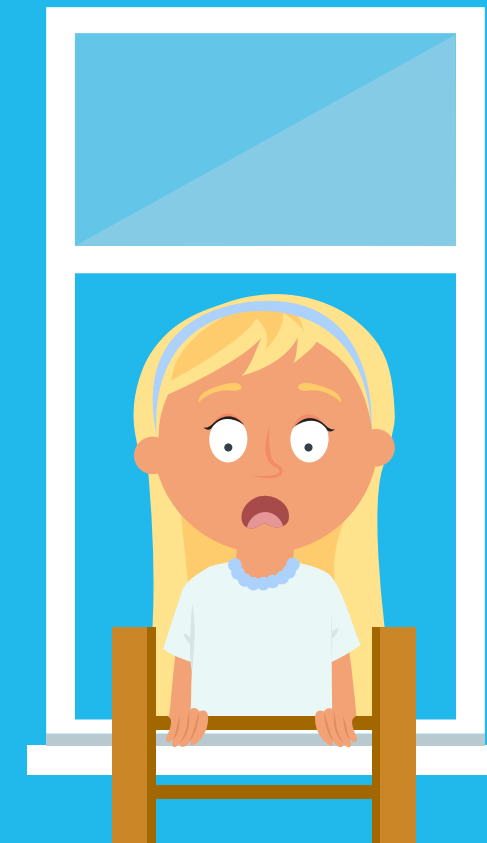
By Kowhai Netana, age 9

The clock struck twelve and Lucy's head struck the bedside table, "Ow!" (She said it quietly, careful not to wake the rest of the orphanage) Lucy sat up in bed, heaved the thin blanket off of herself and crept slowly to the old window. She sighed as she looked up into the thick, black layer of darkness and saw in the distance (by only the light of a few streetlights) the dull grey sea full of deadly plastic, pulling back and forth, back and forth. Her dream was to help it one day, but the orphanage never went to the sea side because the teachers were too strict and cold blooded.

In the morning, Lucy was about to line up for breakfast when suddenly her best friend Lucie (their names are spelt differently but are pronounced the same) whizzed in front of her, pulled her out of the line just in time and into their special hideout the teachers hadn't found for 10 years! "I have a plan!" she whispered excitedly, "We escape, first thing tonight!" That changed Lucy's life forever...



Lucy had platinum blonde hair with sky blue eyes to match. Right now she was in a white nightdress and was about to climb down a 9-storey building with only an old, rickety ladder to hold her. Lucy was afraid of heights. "Don't look down, Lucy. Look at the sky," Lucie called from below. The sky was boring, but she managed perfectly until she got to the bottom. The cold, gravelly stones scratched and nipped at her feet, but she didn't care. She was finally going to the sea!



After what seemed hours but was probably only 20 minutes, they came across an ivy infested wall. "On the other side is the sea", murmured Lucy, breathless from the running. "Yep" Lucie panted "your dream come true." "Give me a leg up," Lucy said, trembling from the cold. Lucie put her hand out, placed her foot on Lucy's hand and pulled herself up. Then she put out her hand and pulled Lucy up too, when the brick that Lucy was on gave way. Lucy screamed.

She moaned "my back is sore!" "Quit your moaning, I'm coming down," replied Lucie. There was a THUD as Lucie jumped down. Lucy stood as still as a statue as she looked, absorbing the wonders around her. The tickly sand between her toes and the lively sea, it was even better than she had imagined. "But how do we help it?" Lucy questioned. "Stole Miss Edge's phone, would that work?" answered Lucie "I didn't know Miss Edge had a phone and yes it will work." Lucy laughed. They went on to youtube and made their own video. Lucy talked about the wonders of the sea and the creatures within that needed our help. It worked. In 32 minutes 9573 people followed! And 1745 people came to help with the biggest litter pick ever! "Let's do this thing!!!" shouted Lucy. That changed the world... Forever.



MASKING THE PROBLEM

By Farrah Lucas, Age 9

It all begins on a typical school day. I get out of bed, brush my teeth, put my school uniform on – an ugly vomit-green jumper, a neon yellow shirt and a black skirt – and pack my bag containing an E-book, my laptop and (of course) my oxygen mask. Every time I look at it, it makes me shudder. I feel like I'm in the middle of World War 2 but I remind myself I'm in 2025.

I arrive at school, and I see that we've been sent to the hall again to top up our oxygen as the pollution level has just been raised. Yeah, I forgot to mention that. We all have to wear masks in London now when pollution is bad. First, it was only the children with asthma, then all of us. I think back to a few years ago and realise how lucky we all were, but how naïve too.

I've been documenting all of this on my vlog: 'My life in a mask'. At first, no-one paid attention. Then, some kid from a small village in the north of Scotland posted something about the difference between our lives and it went viral. People started watching my channel in fear of the problem spreading beyond the big cities.



While we are topping our oxygen up, the bell goes – the bell of doom as I call it. The bell that means we can't go outside until further notice. I don't know where I get the idea. It might be the piercing sound of the bell or the grey smoggy colour of the day, but something snaps inside me. I run out of the hall, climb over the school gate into the busy road outside and rip off my mask. People look at me in astonishment, it's against the law not to wear your mask when the alarm is sounding and no one wants children passing out in public. The government has a reputation to protect. They need to look like they are doing something and this is their answer – to make us look like robots or aliens!

Then it happens. People get out of their cars and begin to take pictures of me on my knees sitting in the smog in the middle of the road with my mask swinging in my hand. In a click of a button, they are all over the internet.

They say the image is like one of those famous ones now – a man in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square, a starving Ethiopian child, and me, on my knees on the Marylebone Road in 2025, struggling to breathe. The Government couldn't ignore it anymore. Petrol and Diesel cars were abolished. For every car that was scrapped a tree was planted. Masks would never help us change things, but one girl, unable to walk down the street and breathe did.

Here today, five years later, I'm sitting in front of my statue taking a deep breath of fresh air.

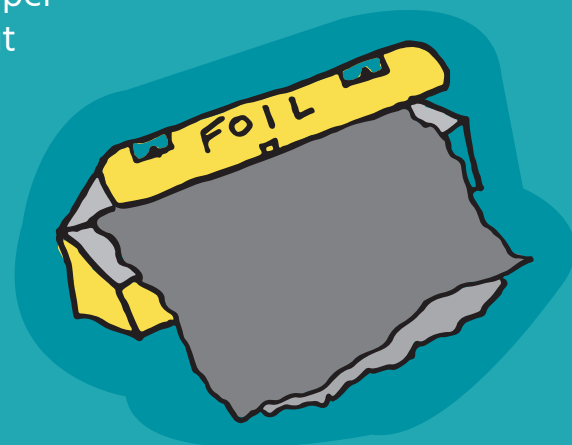


SUPER BOTTLE SAVES THE DAY

By Olivia Stephen, age 6

Once upon a time there was a bottle, but it wasn't an ordinary bottle, it was a super bottle! Why was it super?...Because it could be anything it wanted to be...as long as he got recycled! The bottle's biggest enemy was captain tin foil. He was shiny. He was noisy. He was evil...and he was jealous of super bottle's amazing powers.

One morning super bottle was feeling empty. He knew that it would soon be time for him to go in the bin. When it was time for him to be thrown away, the human hands grabbed him round his tummy really hard. He felt himself get squished. Super bottle could just see captain tin foil laughing at him from the corner of the kitchen. "I will be the ruler of this house now...nobody can get rid of me!!! Hahaha." Super bottle was very upset and felt water drop out of his squished side.



When he was just about to fall into the bin, super bottle wriggled and jiggled and squished his way out of the human hands. He fell to the ground with a small tap. The human looked everywhere for the bottle but it was nowhere to be seen. Super bottle had managed to escape...he was rolling down the driveway towards next door's recycling bin...he was going to make it!!!



Suddenly the human noticed super bottle rolling along the ground towards the neighbours' brand new recycling bin. With a final grab, the human hand picked him up and dumped super bottle into the recycling bin with a bump. Super bottle had found his pals! Together they made a plan. They would get recycled together and be made into packed lunch tubs... then they would make their way back to the house and the humans would not need captain tin foil ever again for sandwiches! Instead they could use their recycled tubs over and over again! More recycling meant a safer world for everyone. Super bottle saves the day!

